

## A Response to Spinoza's Theory of Substance in Light of Thomistic Participation Metaphysics

There have been many people over the course of the history of philosophy who have not only wrestled with the concept of the existence of God, but also with how creatures can be said to relate to God. In this paper, I juxtapose the views of Benedict de Spinoza and St. Thomas Aquinas, with particular attention given to their theories of substance. In tackling the substance monism of Spinoza from a Thomistic perspective, I present what appears to be a conflation of subsistent being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*) and common being (*esse commune*). I maintain that it is precisely this confusion that leads Spinoza to speak of all beings as existing accidentally as finite modes of the divine substance. Once these terms are properly understood, especially in light of formal and efficient causality in Aquinas, what results is a surprising reconciliation between the God of Aquinas and the God of Spinoza.

In the *Ethics*, which is Spinoza's most extensive treatment on metaphysics<sup>1</sup>, Spinoza offers a series of definitions, propositions, and axioms for an explication of his theory of substance. I provide an abridgement of his explication below for the sake of brevity:

**Definition 3:** By substance I understand what is in itself [*in se*] and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.

**Definition 6:** By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.

**Proposition 7 (Demonstration):** A substance cannot be produced by anything else; therefore, it will be the cause of itself, that is, its essence involves existence, or it pertains to its nature to exist.

**Proposition 14 (Demonstration):** If there were any substance except God, it would have to be explained through some attribute of God, and so two substances of the same attribute would exist, which is absurd. And so except God, no substance can be or, consequently, be conceived.

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<sup>1</sup> Spinoza also heavily treats the topic of metaphysics in his “Metaphysical Thoughts” (*Cogitata Metaphysica*), but I have chosen to exclude this work primarily because it is often uncertain which thoughts belong to him and which thoughts belong to Descartes.

**Proposition 15 (Demonstration):** But modes can neither be nor be conceived without substance. So they can be in the divine nature alone, and can be conceived through it alone. But except for substance and modes there is nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning with *Definition 3*, one should bear in mind that since Spinoza is a rationalist, he focuses first on that which can be “conceived.” In other words, Spinoza first conceives of God as substance, then goes on to show how modes of this substance can be predicated of finite things. Aquinas, on the other hand, does not begin with a *propter quid* proof from a definition about that which can be “conceived,” but rather moves from certain phenomena that we experience in the world, such as change, so that we can apply our knowledge of certain effects leading to the discovery of the ultimate cause and how the effects relate to their cause in an analogical manner. Nevertheless, *Definition 3* can be compared to how Aquinas would speak of God if we transform it from a mere conception in the mind to something that is truly demonstrable in reality. The similarity can then be found in the fact that God’s being is the only being which does not require another to account for its actuality.<sup>3</sup>

In *Definition 6*, one can see some commonalities with Aquinas insofar as Spinoza conceives of God as that which is absolutely infinite in essence. Yet, there are also some clear differences in that Aquinas would not accept that God has infinite attributes. Spinoza defines an attribute as follows: “By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.”<sup>4</sup> Spinoza claims that God has infinite attributes due to his conception that God, as an infinite substance, must be

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<sup>2</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 1d3., 1d6., 1p7d., 1p14d., 1p15d., In *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). 85, 88, 93-94.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [hereafter, *ST*], I, q. 2, a. 3, *Second and Revised Edition*. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Online Edition. New Advent, 1920.

<sup>4</sup> *The Ethics*, 1d4.

conceived of having infinite attributes, since to claim otherwise would be to say that there is some way in which God is limited. Moreover, as Spinoza mentions in *Proposition 14*, there cannot possibly be two substances of the same attribute. This is because if two substances (according to how Spinoza conceives of substance) had the same attributes, then there would be no principle of distinction between them, making it the same substance.

Now, Aquinas would certainly agree with the fact that God is infinite, though not exactly in the same sense Spinoza does. For Aquinas, the reason God is infinite in essence, is because it is of God's very nature to be infinite as the uncaused primal being – for something *absolutely* infinite must be its own existence. Yet, for anything other than God, this is impossible. If something exists under a material composition, it must possess a substantial form, since matter cannot exist without form. But anything existing under a substantial form cannot be infinite since a formal principle limits being to a specific nature and not some other one. The material principle of a substance can be considered *relatively* infinite inasmuch as pure potentiality can receive an infinite number of forms.<sup>5</sup> The key word here is ‘relative’ because matter can be said to be ‘infinite’ relative to form, but ‘absolute’ infinity cannot be predicated of anything that is made. Even in reference to pure forms such as the angelic beings who subsist without matter, neither can they be called absolutely infinite. Although angels can be considered relatively infinite inasmuch as the essence of their pure formality is to not be contracted by matter, they cannot be considered absolutely infinite since its being is contracted to a determinate nature *qua* angel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ST I, q. 7, a. 2. *Respondeo*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

With God, according to Aquinas, his essence is said to be absolutely infinite since he is his essence. To understand what this means we have to first consider essence in contingent beings. To use man as an example, to speak of the essence of man is to speak of his humanity as this connotes all that is included in the definition of man.<sup>7</sup> But we know that a subject or individual man is not equal to his essence or else an individual man would be the same as humanity in general.<sup>8</sup> Rather, man is an instantiation of humanity; existing in the form of man, he shares a common nature with other men, yet remains distinct in regard to his designated matter (*materia signata*) as his principle of individuation within the species. God cannot be something other than his essence because as *Actus Purus*, there is no material principle to individuate himself from his form. God must then be understood as subsisting form, or rather subsisting ‘being’ identified as his essence.

God is not just equal to his essence but is also equal to his existence. This is the case for both Spinoza and Aquinas’ concept of God. Spinoza considers God’s essence and existence to be the same, since to speak of God’s attributes is simply to express his existence in various ways as eternal truth.<sup>9</sup> But for Aquinas, this is a salient distinction to make since it shows how God is distinct from every created being. For beings whose existence differs from its essence, have their existence caused (or made actual) by some agent extrinsic to it, thus making existence related to essence as actuality to potentiality.<sup>10</sup> But since God is the first efficient cause of all things and therefore devoid of all passive

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<sup>7</sup> *ST I*, q. 3, a. 3. *Respondeo*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *The Ethics*, 1p20d.

<sup>10</sup> *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4. *Respondeo*.

potency, his essence must be equal to his existence, making him not only infinite in essence, but also infinite in existence.

While Aquinas would, of course, agree that God is infinite, he would not accept Spinoza's idea of infinite attributes in God. This is because although God indeed possesses all the perfections of his effects to a maximum degree, there are attributes of material things that cannot be predicated of God since he is not a being composed of matter and form. Accordingly, God cannot possess attributes that pertain to a body. For instance, God cannot have the attribute of being tall and skinny, since there can be no dimensive quantity (sometimes referred to by Aquinas as corporeal quantity) in an immaterial being.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Spinoza does not conceive of God's attributes (considered in himself) as numerically infinite, but that God must be infinite in every way insofar as his proper definition is to be infinite.

Considering that substance means "God, or Nature" (*Deus, sive Natura*) for Spinoza, if we were to ignore the "nature" part for the time being, *Proposition 7* of Spinoza's ethics squares quite well with Aquinas' concept of God insofar as God alone is causally independent. However, while Spinoza calls God the cause of himself, Aquinas elects to instead say that God is altogether uncaused. For it would be impossible for something to bring itself into existence, since for something to come into being, there would have to be something already in act to actualize the potential for that thing to come into being. God is the first efficient cause of all existing things, and therefore one cannot reasonably speak of any other being preceding him. One thing Aquinas would certainly agree with in this proposition is that it pertains to God's nature to exist, and again, this is

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<sup>11</sup> *STI*, q. 3, a. 1, ad. 1.

because his existence is equal to his essence.<sup>12</sup> While this has already been covered, it may be clearer to say that if we take existence to mean *that* a thing is, and essence to mean *what* a thing is, then the very definition of God necessitates that he exists, as Aquinas points out in his *Tertia Via*.

It should be noted that Spinoza's substance monism is not as radical as someone like Parmenides (known as Eleatic Monism), who held that any multiplicity of being is illusory. Spinoza instead took more of a mitigated stance by claiming that any real diversity in being can be understood as modifications or "modes" of a single substance.<sup>13</sup> Spinoza considered there to be only one substance in that there can only be one being that exists in itself (*in se*), while the Spinozistic mode is thus considered as that which exists in another (*in alio*) just as Aquinas would consider an accident. But the major conflict here lies in the fact that Spinoza conceives of the one substance as the only thing which can exist in itself.

If Spinoza was to mean that God is the only being who can be 'being through itself', then Aquinas would be quick to agree. But Spinoza takes substance to mean existence *in se* in the strictest sense, as something that has no extrinsic denomination. To consider all things other than substance as modes of God is to consider God as the subject of all accidents or "affections" as Spinoza frequently puts it. Aquinas, however, holds that God cannot be a subject, and thus cannot have accidents. There are two main reasons for holding that God cannot be a subject with accidents:

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<sup>12</sup> ST I, q. 3, a. 4. *Respondeo*.

<sup>13</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 74-76.

1) Any accident must be caused by the principles of the subject. But this is impossible in God since he is the first cause and thus cannot have anything caused in him.

2) A subject is that which is made actual by its accidents just as a man can grow a beard and thus have additional actuality received by this modification. But since God is Pure Act, there can be no other actuality received.<sup>14</sup>

Aquinas' definition of substance differs from Spinoza's definition in that Aquinas defines substance as follows: "Being through itself is not included in the definition of substance...A substance is a thing to which it belongs to be not in a subject."<sup>15</sup> This definition is more consistent with the Aristotelian concept of substance. For Aquinas, the idea of substance as "being through itself" is untenable insofar as it would necessarily follow that a substance would be being as such, concluding that everything is a being *per essentiam*. One should note that Aquinas does not consider God as a substance in the strict sense as God cannot be a subject, but he would allow for God to be called a substance in a loose sense insofar as he exists *in se* and not *in alio*. Contrary to Spinoza, Aquinas allows for multiple substances to exist *per se* while still understanding that they depend on an external cause for their existence. Aquinas would likely call consider Spinoza's definition of substance to be question begging since he defines substance as something that can only be one before going on to prove why this must be the case. For Aquinas, God is supremely one as he alone can be absolutely undetermined, but he understands that other things (i.e., substances) can have intrinsic unity (*unum per se*) insofar as they do not exist in a subject, while their substantiality is not equally the cause of unity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *STI*, q. 3, a. 6. *Respondeo*.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* [Hereafter, *SCG*], I.25.10, trans. James F. Anderson, (New York: Hanover House, 1956).

<sup>16</sup> *STI*, q. 11, a. 4, ad. 3.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas conceived of substance as a subject which maintains its identity throughout various accidental changes. Thus, in substances (intellectual substances in particular), some degree of permanency is recognized in our human experience. We are aware that, through time, a continuous ‘I’ recalls actions from prior events in the past and is conscious of a continual acting into the future.<sup>17</sup> For there is a clear principle of self-identity which remains despite our place, time, position, etc. Place and time are some of what Aquinas would consider accidental to a substance. For Aquinas, an accident is that which exists in another rather than in itself. The subject is what gives existence to the accident, so without the subject the accident could not exist.<sup>18</sup> Time would not exist were it not for the motion of actual bodies, and the color green would not exist separately from the grass in one’s front yard, as one does not find the color green without some substance in which it inheres.

All of the conflicts between Aquinas and Spinoza that have been mentioned thus far, can be reconciled with a proper understanding of the participation of effects in their cause. Aquinas’ doctrine of participation demonstrates how he conceives of the relation between created things and their cause. What does it mean to participate in something? In his commentary on Boethius’ *De Hebdomadibus*, he says that to participate is “when something receives in a particular way, that which belongs to another in a universal way.”<sup>19</sup> He then goes on to demonstrate various relations indicative of participation both on the logical level and on the metaphysical level. He speaks of logical relations such as the participation of a species in its genus as man participates

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<sup>17</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 126-127.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae*, 1. 4., trans. R.A. Kocourek, Dominican House of Studies.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Boetii De Hebdomadibus*, trans. Janice L Schultz and Edward A. Synan, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 19.

in animal.<sup>20</sup> This logical participation is considered such insofar as man, as a rational animal, is not identical to “animal” universally, but is a particular animal with rationality as its specific difference.

One point of clarification is to note that Aquinas does not take the position of Plato by affirming a subsisting genus or species, but simply that man is not identical to animal. The metaphysical participation that Aquinas now calls to mind is that of participation via efficient causality (i.e., an effect participating in its cause). He says, “...we should say that air participates in the light of the sun because it does not receive that light with the brilliance it has in the sun.”<sup>21</sup> This analogy points to the fact that what exists in the sun in an undiminished way, is received in a diminished way (by the air) according to the way in which it can receive light.

Spinoza considers substance to be that which is entirely independent, and mode to be that which is dependent on substance.<sup>22</sup> Aquinas would certainly allow for us to say that things exist under a specific mode in a dependent manner, but would clarify further by saying that whatever derives its existence from God is not a mode of God himself, but rather an effect of God who is its cause. The effect does not become *ipsum esse subsistens*, but remains dependent on the first principle as it takes part in *esse commune*. For when we speak of *ipsum esse subsistens*, we are speaking of the being of pure actuality who subsists as a complete being including all the perfections that can be found in creation. *Ipsum esse subsistens* cannot possibly be distinct from creatures in virtue of some addition to its being but is rather distinguished by the very fact that it subsists as existence through itself.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Avraham Rot, “The Ontological Status of the Affects in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, 71, no. 4, (2018), 67.

To further illustrate the fact that participated *esse* cannot be the *esse formale* of God, in the spirit of Aquinas' undiminished and diminished sunlight example, let us consider what happens when fire heats a pan. The fire, being the efficient cause of the heat in the pan, can be truly understood as the cause of the heat in the pan, but the causal efficacy of the fire upon the pan does not somehow make the pan receive the form of fire. In other words, placing a pan on a lit gas stove does not make the pan transform into fire, since the pan remains a pan. Rather, the pan receives the effect of 'heat' from the fire and receives it in a way that it is able, given its form. The pan receives the effect of heat in a way a pan can receive heat according to its *modus essendi*. Likewise, all created things receive their existence as an 'effect' according to their nature as a 'created' being.

Let us now turn to one of Aquinas' most mature works, for an explanation that will help us to understand a key detail in this Creator-creature distinction:

...since it is necessary that the First Principle be most simple, this must of necessity be said to be not as participating in "to be" [*esse*] but as itself being "to be" [*esse*]. But because subsistent "to be" can be only one ... then necessarily all other things under it must be as participating in "to be." Therefore, there must take place a certain common resolution in all such things according as each of them is reduced by the intellect into that which is [*id quod est*] and its "to be." Therefore, above the mode of coming to be, by which something becomes when form comes to matter, we must presuppose another origin for things according as "to be" is bestowed upon the whole universe of things by the First Being that is its own "to be."<sup>23</sup>

This distinction between *esse* and *id quod est* further clarifies what has been said so far. For as was just seen in Aquinas' commentary on Boethius' *De Hebdomadibus*, we have to make distinctions between the universality (abstractness) and the particularity (concreteness) of things to understand the way in which a thing can be said to participate in another. In interpreting the

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, 9.48, trans. Francis J. Lescoe, (West Hartford, CT: Saint Joseph College, 1959).

above quotation from *De Substantiis Separatis*, we can use what is explained in *De Hebdomadibus* to decipher these terms. For Aquinas, by *esse*, he speaks of that which is signified abstractly such as “to run” (*currere*), and *id quod est* as that which is signified concretely as when we say “one running” (*currens*).<sup>24</sup> In other words, just as someone running participates in the act of running, likewise *esse* is considered not as some subject who has being (*habens esse*), but rather as the very act of being itself (*ipsum esse*). Put another way, *id quod est* is that which participates in the act of being (*actus essendi*) in a concrete way, by being the subject of existence – (*ens*). Thus, Aquinas would say that any being which has existence, has its existence ultimately from that which just is existence itself. That is, it must be the most universal being of which we cannot speak of as simply possessing being, but ‘is’ being by its very nature; it cannot be the subject of being, but must be the cause for being in all things participated.

An error of Spinoza with regard to substance, then, lies in his conflation of what participates by way of efficient causality, as opposed to what participates by way of formal causality. It is true that if God was the *esse formale* of all beings, then all things would ultimately be of one substance as Spinoza claims. But this is impossible since the cause of the being of all things must be over and above its effects. God cannot in any way be said to have a likeness to his creatures, but his creatures can be said to have a likeness to him. Notice that this relation between Creator and creature can only go one way, since *esse* belongs to God by essence and to creatures by participation as has been shown. As a simple illustration of this, consider that a man is not said to be like his image, but that the image is said to be like the man insofar as the image of the man is not equal to the man but possesses a likeness to him.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Boetii De Hebdomadibus*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> SCG, I.29.5

Admittedly, this can begin to look, *prima facie*, to be almost consistent with what Spinoza is saying in that all contingent beings are in God inasmuch as they participate in being – thereby positing an accidental existence belonging to all. But this is to confuse the being of which things participate, for the being participated is not subsistent existence itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), but what Aquinas refers to as *esse commune*. *Esse Commune* refers to the being that is common to all things. But one might wonder how this can be distinguished from the being of God since both God and creatures ‘exist’, and thus have in common the very fact of their existence. However, by *esse commune*, Aquinas is not referring to being with respect to the facticity of existence, but rather as being considered as something common to all members of a class.<sup>26</sup> In this case, it is clear that *esse commune* cannot be predicated of God since he is the cause of all members of a given class – namely, as the first efficient cause of all creatures.

It can be said, then, that creatures participate in the uncreated or unparticipated being of God through the ‘intermediary’ of *esse commune* – being received according to the mode of the receiver.<sup>27</sup> *Esse commune* is thus a way in which one can envisage the created being (*esse creatum*) as distinct from the divine being (*esse divinum*). In other words, the being of creatures is distinguished from the divine being insofar as the being of creatures is derivative, while the divine being is the source from which all created beings receive their *esse*.<sup>28</sup> In this way, existence can be said to be accidental to an essence of which is not equal to existence.

There is another sense, however, in which existence can be said to belong *per se* to essence insofar as that particular essence (if it is tied to an act of existence) is the proper subject

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<sup>26</sup> Rudi Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1995), 190-191.

<sup>27</sup> Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1992), 143.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 145.

of existence.<sup>29</sup> That is to say, *esse* must be included in the definition of a substance as every substance, insofar as it is an *ens*, must possess an *actus essendi* in order to be realized in actuality. Thus, Aquinas says that “being is an accident, not as though related accidentally to a substance, but as the actuality of any substance...”<sup>30</sup> In other words, while the ‘substantiality’ of a created thing belongs to it through itself and not through another, its ‘actuality’ must be received through another or else it would be altogether uncaused.<sup>31</sup> This is another area where Aquinas clearly would disagree with Spinoza since it is clear that Spinoza conflates the distinction in the accidental relation of existence with the actuality of substance (seeing that *esse* does not belong to it essentially), with the essential relation of existence to the substance, considered as the proper subject of existence as an *ens*.

Spinoza’s errors ultimately amount to the grand mistake of attributing all created beings to the necessary being by a univocal predication. To be fair, this is not to say that he considered God and his “affections” to be equal, for he is specific to make the distinction between the active and passive aspects of nature – namely, between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*.<sup>32</sup> In other words, Spinoza is not so strict a pantheist so as to make the claim that all creatures are absolutely equal with their necessary cause, but that all of “natured nature” is in God.<sup>33</sup> His reasoning for this is that whatever has determinate existence must necessarily exist in a different way than God since what exists in a determinate mode cannot be conceived without God as its cause, and when understanding God in his essence *qua Natura naturans*, he must be wholly

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965, Reprint, 2007), 66.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q. 2, a 1, ad. 2. trans. Sandra Edwards (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> SCG II.52.6.

<sup>32</sup> Steven Nadler, “Whatever is, is in God”: *Substance and Things in Spinoza’s Metaphysics*. In *Interpreting Spinoza*. ed. Charlie Heunemann, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 66.

<sup>33</sup> *The Ethics*, 1p29d.

indeterminate.<sup>34</sup> So, while Spinoza does conceive of both *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* under the same order of being, there is a clear distinction that comes by way of understanding the former as activity itself and the latter as that which is being acted upon.<sup>35</sup>

Spinoza's claim is thus that God and his attributes are identified as the 'whole' of nature as opposed to a 'part' of nature when considered *qua Natura naturans*. For to identify God as part of nature would be to contradict Spinoza's concept that God is a being absolutely infinite – since a part of nature would most certainly be finite inasmuch as it is a part. Spinoza can be accused of univocal predication yet still, because of the fact that he considers finite modes as parts of the one substance considered *qua Natura naturata*. It is this latter consideration of things existing in God according to various spatio-temporal modes of existence, that even with a distinction between the divine essence considered in itself, and modes of the divine essence by way of efficient causality, the effects of the cause are not in any way a 'part' of the cause unless we are to consider this strictly by the effect's dependency upon its cause.

Aquinas points out that we cannot even speak of God in a way univocal to creatures because in creatures, things are divided and multiplied – but in God, things are simple and one.<sup>36</sup> For when we talk about the divine attributes, we do not talk about them in the same way that we would of creatures since what is attributed to creatures will always fall short in some respect to the way in which it can be said about God.<sup>37</sup> In other words, whatever is predicated of creatures will differ from God in its *modus significandi*. For example, when we say that God is wise and that man is wise, we have to take notice of the shift of meaning in the predicate. For when we

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<sup>34</sup> *The Ethics*, 1p28s.

<sup>35</sup> Yitzhak Melamed, *Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist*. In *Spinoza on Monism*. Ed. Philip Goff, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 215.

<sup>36</sup> ST I, q. 13, a. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

say that man is wise, this predication of wisdom signifies something distinct from other perfections that man possesses. Whereas in God, wisdom does not mean anything distinct from his essence, being that he ‘is’ his wisdom.<sup>38</sup> Thus, we can say that the meaning of the predicate shifts along with the meaning of the copula due to the fact that the mode of being in a creature is considered as finite while the being of God is infinite. Equivocal predication cannot be had since wisdom in God and in man is not a reality that is entirely different, but one varying in degree.

For the reasons mentioned so far, the only way we can predicate of creatures some attribute of God is by way of analogy, for there are senses in which things can be considered as common, but only if we are to mean that all perfections in man are signified in a diminished way, while all of man’s perfections are pre-contained in God to the maximum degree as the first efficient cause of all participated beings. A divine similitude is in created beings in that God creates things other than himself in ‘likeness’ of himself. That is to say, created beings have their *esse* in common with God in an analogous sense, since created beings have *esse* as distinct from their essence, while God has *esse* by his very essence.<sup>39</sup> Aquinas says that from this we know that God cannot be in a genus, since anything in a genus must have an essence (quiddity) that is other than its existence.<sup>40</sup> It seems that Spinoza also wants to group God into a genus, and this would make sense of his conclusion about God and creatures in that every genus entails an essence that is common to all. But this is manifestly false, since all things which have existence in common cannot possibly have an existence equal to its essence. God is *one* in the most perfect way, while creatures are one insofar as they have being. Yet creatures are also *many* insofar as they have essences distinct from existence itself. That is to say, the perfections in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 116.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Being and Essence*, 89.

creatures exist in God maximally, but the *modus essendi* of created things cannot possibly be in God for he cannot be restricted to a determinate nature.

As we have come to see, the disagreement between the Thomistic and Spinozistic view of God and creation is not one of major conflict with respect to the real distinction of essence and existence, but rather, with respect to their views on efficient and formal causality as well as the way in which the being of God and creatures is signified. It seems to make little sense to claim that an infinite God (*Natura naturans*) be altogether indivisible, and yet somehow cause exist in a divisible mode (*Natura naturata*) flowing from its nature as (*Natura naturans*). For this reason, one should instead take a more reasonable approach, using Aquinas' view of participation to clarify the way in which God and creation can be properly understood, without resorting in some manner to a univocal predication. Our participation in God's being, at least on the natural level, cannot be one of formal causality,<sup>41</sup> but rather one of efficient causality as the purely actual being imparts his active power upon creation without communicating divinity in the process. Spinoza's error thus results in his theory of 'modes' which consequently leads to a qualified version of pantheism, as he places God and creation along the same order of being and consequently committing to a naturalization of God.

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<sup>41</sup> There are some who may object and claim that there is a dim sense in which we participate in God formally inasmuch as we exist in the divine mind. But this would be considered in a different sense which Aquinas refers to as exemplar causality as all creatures represent the divine idea, "as a material house is like to the house in the architect's mind." (ST I, q. 44, a. 3, ad 1). This existence is to be understood in the divine mind as *esse increatum* and in things as *esse creatum*.

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